

BARBOUR BOAT WORKS
Tryon Palace Drive
New Bern
Craven County
North Carolina

HAER No. NC-44

HAER
NC
25-VEEBER,
29-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD
National Park Service
1849 C St, NW
Washington, DC 20240

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Location: At the intersection of Tryon Palace Drive and Metcalf Street along the Trent River, New Bern, Craven County, North Carolina

Date of Construction: 1930s-1970s

Type of Structure: Industrial Marine Complex / Shipyard / Boat Works / Marine Railway

Use: Boat Building / Shipyard / World War II Defense Building

Designer/Engineer: Various

Fabricator/Builder: Various

Owner: Barbour Boat Works (R.R. Rivenbark, Sr. President)/State of North Carolina

Significance: The Barbour Boat Works produced a variety of wooden water craft for recreational use from the 1930s through the early 1960s. Intermittently, the shipyard constructed larger vessels for military and commercial use. Most notable, were wood-hulled minesweepers produced from American designs for the British Navy during World War II. More recently, the shipyard was used for vessel repair and maintenance. At the date of this recording project the Barbour Boat Works was being sold to the State of North Carolina.

Project Information: Documentation of Barbour Boat Works was prepared under the co-sponsorship of the HABS/HAER Division of the National Park Service and the Tryon Palace Historic Sites and Gardens (TPHSG) with cooperation from the North Carolina State Historic Preservation Office (NCSHPO) and the North Carolina Maritime Museum (NCMM). For more information on the Barbour Boat Works contact North Carolina Maritime Museum and East Carolina University Archives, which contain historic photographs and business records.

Contributing individuals from the above institutions included:
Todd Croteau (HABS/HAER)
Jet Lowe (HABS/HAER)
Peter Sandbeck (TPHSG)
Scott Power (NCSHPO)
Paul Fontenoy (NCMM)

This recording project is dedicated to the memory of Rembert R. Rivenbark, Sr., President of Barbour Boat Works, who passed away two months after the field survey. His interest in the Barbour Boat Works and its documentation for posterity was extremely helpful. His efforts to gather historic documents and offer information about operations of BBW contributed immensely to the understanding of the complex.

Barbour Boat Works: Building Names and Descriptions

The following list provides building names in two ways. The first name for each building is the historical name assigned to the building by Mr. Rembert R. Rivenbark, owner of the Barbour Boat Works. The second name (in parentheses) is the modern name assigned by the Barbour Boat Works in 1984, as shown on a plan of the company's facilities and key to that plan, dated 10 Oct. 1984. Appearing below each name is a brief historical description for each structure, based on conversations with R. R. Rivenbark held in October and November, 1997, with subsequent clarifications and refinements by Scott Power and Peter Sandbeck. *Note: Building numbers are keyed to the HAER Photo Index Map prepared by Todd Croteau.*

HAER Map

Building

Number:

Historical or Original Name/use (with name on 1984 map) and date(s)

1.

Showroom and Main Office (Main Office and Showroom); 1945

Built in 1945 as a combined showroom and office building. Designed by Mr. Barbour to serve as a showroom for their line of small boats and also the Chris Craft boats; they were a Chris-Craft dealer for a few years. Mr. Barbour employed some of the shipyard workers on this project as a way to keep them employed until the small boat production line could get up to speed. The boat builders constructed the pilot house and related interior woodwork in a nautical motif. Mr. Rivenbark and Mr. Barbour shared the office at the west side upstairs.

2.

Weeks Grocery Building (Office); cat 1946-47

Structure relocated from Camp Davis (a WW II Army facility in Pender County, NC) after the camp was closed 1946. Structure was dismantled and rebuilt by Lila Vincent, who owned the property on the corner; she used it as a rental building. It was occupied by M. M. Weeks and Son as a grocery store until it was acquired by Barbour, probably in the early 1950's. The present brick veneer facade was added cat 1955; this remodeling is shown in progress the Sept., 1954 aerial view. Mr. Rivenbark referred to this as the Weeks Grocery Building.

3.

Mold Loft #1 (Materials Storeroom); cat 1941

Built as the first mold loft for the minesweeper operation, cat 1941. It was originally constructed on the site of the modern steel fabrication building (#17/18 on HAER plan), then moved to its present location behind the showroom after WW II. probably in 1947; the showroom was standing when it was moved. The large south extension was added (date uncertain: ca: 1947-50?); it has a slightly higher roof and greater width to serve as a machinery room. The mold loft

was converted into a stock room at the time it was moved to the present site. Original tongue-and-groove wood flooring still shows the outlines of lofting scribed in surface of boards; much of the scribing is now under a later flooring and shelving units. The rear extension was incorporated into the stockroom operation later, probably during the mid-1950's.

4.

Stockroom Office (Purchasing and Timekeeping Office); cat 1947-1950

This was built to serve as the stockroom office, cat 1947-1950, as an addition to the existing stockroom. It was later converted to the timekeeping/payroll office.

5.

Payroll Office (Resident Supship Office); cat 1947-1950?

Original date and use not clear. May have been built specifically for the payroll office use. Probably 1947-1950.

6.

Early Barbour Boat Works Building (Outside Machinists); cat 1934-35

Probably the oldest structure still standing on the boat works site, this appears to date back to the mid 1930's period of the infant boat works, during which time it housed the offices of the operation. During WW II, the Naval Inspectors maintained their offices in the north end of the building, while the Yard Superintendent's office was at the south end. Paint storage and related activities were housed in the center portion. Payroll expanded into this building during the war period, then it returned to paint storage during the 1950's and later. Mr. Rivenbark had his office here for a time; it was later converted to the paint storage area. This surviving structure is not to be confused with the first or original building, which stood on the southwestern portion of the present site, close to the Trent River; the original building, which was demolished in the 1940's or 1950's, was probably the same structure that is shown on the 1931 Sanborn Map as the "Barbour & Hunnings Handle Factory," and thus pre-dated the establishment of the boat works.

7.

Warner's Cafe Building (Reggie's Outboard Service); 1952

Portions of this building were built in 1930's as a warehouse sited adjacent to the curved rail siding located on the east side of the railroad tracks, on the south side of South Front Street. (shown on 1944 Sanborn Insurance Map) This long frame warehouse had a curved section in center to follow

RR track curve. When it was taken over by the boat works, the curved section was cut out from the middle to

create two roughly equal size structures which were then moved to the present site in 1952. The two halves were oriented with their gables facing South Front, with the roof ridges running north to south. The two sections were joined along the side walls to create a single structure which became Warner's Café. The brick veneer facade was added right after the two halves were moved to this site to create a unified facade. The present brick facade is shown in the 1954 aerial photo. This was converted to outboard motor sales during early 1960's.

8.

Dining Room for Warner's Cafe (Warehouse/Office); after 1954

Built after 1954 to provide additional dining room space for the cafe; it is not shown on an aerial view of the site taken in September of that year. This was used for hardware storage after it ceased being a café.

9.

Cushion and Seat Building (Engine Test/Parts); late 1950's

Not shown standing in the 1954 aerial photo of the site. This served for only a few years as the shop where cushions and seats were made for the small boat lines. This was converted to a retail store area after small boat production ceased in 1962, and later adapted for engine parts storage and testing. A large opensided, gable-roofed one-story structure stood on this location in 1954, and is also shown on the 1945 site plan.

10.

Engine Installation Room (Stores); after 1954

Built in the mid-to-late 1950's on the site of a large open-sided building shown in a 1954 photo; possibly reusing materials from that first structure. It was first used as the building where engines were installed in the inboard or i/o model small boats, then converted to dynamometer testing after 1962 when company ceased small boat production. This was where the large diesel engines were tested, up to 500 hp. The shed on the south side of this structure was for large engine overhaul, such as tug engines and Army tugs.

11.

Refinishing Department (Engine Overhaul Shop); built after 1954

Built in mid-to-late 1950's on the site of the large open sided building which stood here; it is possible that materials from that building were re-used in this

one. This was first used to house the refinishing department, where the final finishes were applied to top off the preliminary finishes used in conjunction with the paint room and spray booth in building #12.

12.

Paint Shop (Electrical Shop); cat 1955

This was built to provide a controlled environment for varnishing and painting. Heated varnish was used, with a spray booth at the south end. They could fit 6 small boats inside the small booth, and 10 to 12 boats in the larger space at the north end. They heated the varnish (Wolsey's Hot Spar Gloss Varnish) for approximately 18-22 minutes.

13.

Lumber Storage (Machine Shop); built cat 1941; moved after 1954

Built cat 1941 as a wood framed, open sided gable roofed shed structure, for storage of lumber for the mine sweeper construction. After the war, it was moved a short distance westward, converted to a machine shop and enclosed "around 1955" according to Mr. Rivenbark. It had not yet been moved to its present site in the 1954 aerial view, so this is consistent. It remained a machine shop until the yard closed in 1997.

14.

Addition to Machine Shop; built after 1954 (*demolished: 1999*)

15.

Air Compressor House (Compressor Building); cat 1941

This housed two double compressors at the west side (Westinghouse compressors) which were air cooled but got too hot; they had double-ended electric motors. The later Sullair unit was purchased used from a mining company out west; it provided good service. (*demolished: 1999*)

16.

First Machine Shop (Sheet Metal Shop); cat 1941

According to Mr. Rivenbark, this was built as the machine shop during the early war years, so it probably dates from the 1941 period of massive building activity. This was once a larger building, perhaps twice the length of the present structure; the south half was demolished at an unknown date. It is shown in its larger form in both the 1945 site plan and in the 1954 aerial view, which shows the saw mill

and planing mill standing just north of this building. After the war, probably cat 1955, this structure was converted to the propeller shop where props were repaired and tuned; the south half was removed. It was used as a pipe shop and served as a sheet metal shop in recent years. *(demolished: 1999)*

17.

#2 Fabrication Building (Construction Building); mid 1960's

This is a modern steel-framed pre-fab structure used for steel fabrication operations. *(demolished: 1997)*

18.

#3 Fabrication Building (Construction Building); late 1960's

This is the most recent of the three modern steel fabrication buildings on the site. *(demolished: 1997)*

19.

#2 Mold Loft (Carpenter Shop/Mold Loft); built 1942

Built in 1942 as an open sided mold loft structure for large ship construction for Naval contract work, and converted to small boat assembly in 1945. Before this was built, all small boats were built on the west side of the yard. It took about six months to convert back to small boat output. The entire large southern portion was used for production, with a clear span roof truss system well suited for assembly work. There was a 30' extension northward which originally served as office space for the small boat operations; this was later torn down. The rest of the north end was modified to serve as the saw mill and planing mill area, where that equipment was moved after the original planing mill was torn down. The assembly line consisted of 4 lines running the length of the southernmost 2/3 of the building, with 8 work stations, so they could produce 8 boats per day. The assembly tools were originally powered by compressed air, but they converted to electric tools because they could control the torque more easily. *(demolished: 1999)*

20.

Sandblasting Shed (Construction Building); cat 1957

Steel building used for sandblasting and Light fabrication. *(demolished: 1997)*

21.

Barracks (Tool Room and Storage); 1941

Built to house crews during training and outfitting of ships being built in the yard. It was designed to house 3 crews or approximately 72 men. They finished construction and were inspected by the Naval inspector, who told them they could not house crews in the structure because it did not meet the Navy's rules for fireproof construction. Thus, it was never used for crew housing but instead served as a storage facility. (*demolished: 1999*)

22.

Marine Railway #1; 1940; rebuilt 1970

This is the largest of the railways, with a capacity of 1,000 tons. It hold a vessel measuring 180' x 38'. This was the principal railway for in the yard for all large vessels. It is positioned just east of the large concrete grade beam which runs north-south; they are parallel. The keels of the steel hulled vessels were laid out on the concrete grade beam to allow them to true up the keel, then as the ship progressed, it was shifted over onto the #1 railway to be completed and launched, making room for a new hull which could be laid on the concrete beam while the previous ship was completed on the railway.

23.

Marine Railway #2; 1941

This railway dates to 1941, with a design capacity of 600 tons. It holds vessels up to 132' x 32'. (*demolished: 1998-99*)

24.

Marine Railway #3; 1953

Built in 1953, with a capacity of 250 tons, holding vessels up to 90' x 24'. (*demolished: 1998-99*)

25.

Marine Railway #4; 1930's

This is the smallest of the railways, with a capacity of 125 tons, handling vessels up to 55' x 20'. It was the first railway built by Barbour Boat Works; it has been largely rebuilt over the years but is in the original location. (*demolished: 1998-99*)

26.

General Construction, Layout and Fabrication Building (Construction Building);
platform built early 1940's; structure added cat 1955-57

The base platform for this structure was built as a work platform for construction of the minesweepers. The structure, with its distinctive arched roofline, was built to provide an enclosed, heated space for larger construction projects. It was designed by local engineer Albert "Scrappy" Bell, who told Mr. Rivenbark that the wood frame and pipe-truss structure could withstand winds of up to 100 mph without damage. It survived all hurricanes with only minor damage until Fran, when some of the exterior barn tin panels came loose in the wind and high tide. To build the structure, the original platform was enlarged by five additional sections of pilings at the south end. It was originally equipped with electric heat, which proved too expensive to operate. Coal stoves were installed to replace the electric heat.

27.

Boat House (Boat House); cat 1950

Built cat 1950-1954 as a boathouse for smaller craft and boats owned by Barbour Boat Works. Demolished by Hurricane Fran in Sept., 1996.

28.

Crews Berthing (Crews Berthing); cat 1941

Demolished by Hurricane Fran in Sept., 1996. Built to house English crews, who were shipped over to take the wood minesweepers back to England. Mr. Rivenbark recalled that this building had a large gas stove with large cast-iron plates, which fell into the water during the hurricane.